

December 1, 2013 Stay Awake Homily

Dear brothers and sisters, in the not-too- distant past, a game enjoyed by many Americans was Trivial Pursuit. Trivia is mostly useless information and of little import in our daily life.

Let me begin my sermon by asking a trivial question. In the beloved animated classic, "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," can you name the seven little friends of Snow White? The answer of course is: Doc, Dopey, Grumpy, Bashful, Sneezzy, Happy and Sleepy. Perhaps you can identify with one of the seven dwarfs. I suspect that some members of my parish staff may suggest that I most resemble Dopey! Just don't call me sleepy!

In St. Paul's letter to the nascent Christian community in Rome, he writes: "It is now the hour for you to wake from sleep" (Rom.13:11). It is time for Christians to awake from their slumber, to get up from their beds. What is the meaning of Paul's words?

Several years ago, the Archbishop of Paris, Jean Marie Lustiger was interviewed by a French journalist, who was intent on addressing some of the more controversial issues of his day. The reporter asked him to evaluate the papacy of Pope John Paul II. Clearly, the journalist was displeased with the Pope's views on human sexuality, abortion, the role of women in the Church and marriage. The Cardinal's reply was brief and very much to the point. He said: "The Pope is wide awake; the conscience of humanity is sleeping".

St. Paul reminded the Christians in the springtime of their faith that they are called upon to show, by their words and deeds, that they are truly disciples of Jesus and to conduct themselves in a manner suitable to their vocation. "Throw off deeds of darkness" (Rom. 13:12), writes the Apostle to the Gentiles. "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ"(Rom.13:14). The temptation for the early Christians was to return to their pagan ways and fail to witness to Christ and prepare for His Second Coming in glory. In our Gospel reading Jesus Christ exhorts his disciples to "stay awake" in anticipation of his promised coming (Mt. 24: 42).

Our Epistle reading also had a profound influence on one of the great saints of the Catholic Church, St. Augustine. In his famous autobiography, Augustine wrote of walking in a garden one lazy afternoon. He was in great distress because of his many failures to lead a virtuous life. He cried: "How long? How long must I wait?" Augustine unexpectedly heard a soft voice, the voice of a child, saying, "Take and read". He hurried back to his seat, where his friend Alypius was sitting, for he had left there a volume of St. Paul's writings. He read silently. The first words his eyes fell upon were the following:

"Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us conduct ourselves properly as in the day, not in orgies and drunkenness, nor of promiscuity and lust, not in rivalry and jealousy, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 13:12-13).

At that moment, Augustine was converted. It was one of the defining moments of his extraordinary life.

In many sporting events, it is not uncommon for a team to call a time-out before a key play or crucial point in the game. For us who are Catholics, Advent is a “time-out” and a wake-up call.

Let us all take advantage of the season of Advent and call “time-out” so that we may take a closer look at our spiritual life. As Christmas draws near, let us "stay awake" and be prepared for the coming of Our Savior by remaining vigilant and watchful in our daily life.

Let us never confuse Christianity with paganism, and let us put on the Lord Jesus Christ!

Amen.